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Tim W Hayes 03/06/2007 02:55:29 PM From DB/Inbox: Tim W Hayes

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Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L

ANKARA 00465

SIPDIS

CX:

ACTION: POL
INFO: CONS PMA ECON DCM AMB RAO TSR FCS PA MGT DAO

DISSEMINATION: POL /1

CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: POL:KCDEGNAN

DRAFTED: POL:DBURGER

CLEARED: NONE

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1162

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU IMMEDIATE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA// IMMEDIATE

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// IMMEDIATE

RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK IMMEDIATE

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RHMFSS/425ABS IZMIR TU//CC// IMMEDIATE

RHMFSS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU IMMEDIATE

RUEPGAB/MNF-I C2X BAGHDAD IZ IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000465

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2022

TAGS: PREL PTER PGOV TU IZ

SUBJECT: DESPITE ILL WILL, TURKEY PLANS TO MOVE FORWARD ON
OUTREACH TO IRAQI KURDS

REF: ANKARA 387

Classified By: Acting POL/C Kelly Degnan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Turkey plans to proceed with its planned outreach to the Iraqi Kurds, but what officials view as a steady stream of unhelpful rhetoric from the KRG leadership complicates this effort. Turks are dismayed by Masoud Barzani's Feb. 26 interview on Turkish television -- and annoyed by the Secretary's reference to "Kurdistan" in recent Congressional testimony -- but seem to realize too much is at stake to just walk away from engagement. End summary.

¶2. (C) Mounting Turkish anger at the rhetoric of KRG President Barzani -- most recently in an unusual lengthy Feb. 26 interview on Turkish television -- may be further complicating GOT plans for dialogue with the Iraqi Kurds. Barzani's comments came hard on the heels of a Feb. 23 National Security Council meeting, at which the GOT and Turkish military leaders agreed to intensify Turkish diplomatic efforts on Iraq. This signaled that the GOT would proceed with its (as yet unannounced) plans for FonMin Gul to

meet KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani in the near future. MFA officials were pleased with the outcome, declaring to us that the GOT had successfully defused TGS attempts to block dialogue with the KRG (see reftel).

¶3. (C) Though Barzani in his interview said he appreciated Turkey's plans for dialogue, Turkish officials and the press believe that he did little to reassure a nervous Turkish public about the PKK, Kirkuk, and potential Kurdish independence. On the PKK, Barzani rejected TGS allegations of KRG support for the terrorist organization, and challenged Turkey to provide proof. "The PKK's presence in the Kandil region is not dependent on our approval," he asserted, and implied that the KRG cannot control "this distant region." "Are you to blame for the PKK's presence" in Turkish territory, he asked.

¶4. (C) Barzani professed "astonishment" that Kirkuk is an issue in Turkey, adding that "it has been proven that Kirkuk is part of Kurdistan both historically and geographically." He crossly denied that any Kurds beyond those expelled by Saddam have come to Kirkuk since 2003. Barzani confirmed that under the Iraqi constitution (that was accepted by "80% of the population"), there must be a referendum on Kirkuk's final status by the end of the year. On independence, he maintained that the "taboo" on the subject should end: "Independence is the Kurds' most natural right."

¶5. (C) Turkish leaders responded with predictable displeasure to Barzani's remarks. FonMin Gul cautioned Barzani against overreaching, noting that Saddam had also not been realistic in his aspirations. PM Erdogan called Barzani's statements on the PKK "ugly." Officials told us they were disappointed that Barzani did not use this opportunity to send a positive message directly to the Turkish people.

¶6. (C) Officials from both MFA and the Prime Ministry have told us that Barzani's remarks have complicated plans for a Gul-Nechirvan Barzani meeting, but PM/FM chief foreign policy advisor Davutoglu and MFA contacts have assured us that Gul still plans to go ahead. However, they also requested that we urge Barzani to cool down his rhetoric. Specifically, they ask that Barzani show some willingness to engage Turkey constructively on PKK and Kirkuk, or express some understanding for the Turkish point of view (especially on PKK, which they expect would hold much less political risk for Barzani). PM Adviser Nabi Avci told us Feb. 27 that it may be easier for the GOT to go ahead with contacts with the Iraqi Kurds in the context of intense Turkish diplomatic activity on both the Middle East (kicked off by the Feb. 24 Islamabad meeting of moderate Muslim states) and the enlarged Iraq neighbors meeting process. Avci also urged us to "work on" Barzani, however.

¶7. (C) Adding to this atmosphere, if only temporarily, is official Turkish concern over Secretary Rice's Feb. 27 use of the "K-word": Kurdistan. In an appearance before the Senate Appropriations Committee, the Secretary discussed the PKK, "which has operated on the border between Turkey and Kurdistan." PM Erdogan responded Feb. 28 by emphasizing "our southern neighbor is Iraq. It has a federal structure, but our interlocutor is the central government."

¶8. (C) Comment: Turkish anger over Barzani's remarks may cloud the picture, but we believe the GOT will proceed with its plan for Gul to meet Nechirvan Barzani. The GOT understands how much is at stake. However, what is viewed here as unhelpful rhetoric from KRG leaders makes such a dialogue increasingly hard to sell to the Turkish public. End comment.

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